

## Memorial: Albert O. Brecht (1946–2012)\*

¶1 Albert Brecht was born in Dallas, Texas, in 1946. He attended the University of North Texas, where he had a double major in government and sociology. His interest in government led him to the University of Houston College of Law. It was there that Albert found his calling in life. He worked part-time as a student assistant in the law library. After graduating from Houston, he enrolled in the Master of Law Librarianship program at the University of Washington.

¶2 As he was finishing his studies there, in the spring of 1973, he interviewed for a position at the University of Southern California (USC), and in June of that year began as an assistant law librarian at the Gould School of Law. About eighteen months after Albert joined USC, the library director who hired Albert, Francis Gates, left USC to lead the Columbia Law Library. Dean Dorothy Nelson asked Albert to serve as interim director while the law school conducted a national search for the next director. The search committee screened dozens of candidates, and brought seven candidates out to the law school to meet with the faculty. At the end of the process, Dean Nelson wrote to the vice president, “Our nationwide search has convinced us that of all the librarians in the nation who expressed any interest at all in moving to the University of Southern California under any terms, Mr. Brecht showed the greatest promise of those screened and interviewed.”

¶3 During this time period, no law school was better at finding talent, and the judgment that the school made about Albert was no exception. Albert executed a vision of a law library that was at the time remarkable, but has since become commonplace. To understand that vision, it is helpful to recall where the Gould School was in its evolution at the time. USC was transitioning from being a strong regional school to becoming one of the country’s leading law schools. We had outsized aspirations, but not outsized resources. At the time, law libraries were measured by the strength and depth of their collections—how many volumes they had. This was a game that we could not win. But Albert did not play that game. Rather, he built a library team for whom the sole focus was getting the information needed into the hands of the users. Let me repeat that—get the information needed into the hands of the users. It was a vision in which the library partnered with and provided for the faculty and students of the school.

¶4 In the thirty-seven years that Albert led our library, there was not a better library in the country at executing this vision. Albert hired, trained, and mentored his staff to implement this vision and adapt it to changing times. Albert was a leader in recognizing the role that the technological revolution would have in the world of law libraries, and he ensured that USC was on the cutting edge. In recog-

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\* © USC Gould School of Law, 2012. On May 22, 2012, a memorial service was held for Albert O. Brecht at the USC Gould School of Law. The tributes contained here are edited versions of the remarks given at that service.

dition of Albert's leadership in this regard, in 1998 he was named Chief Information Officer and John Stauffer Professor of Law.

¶5 While Albert's legacy to USC and the world of law librarianship includes the reorientation of libraries toward a service ethos, this by no means exhausts his accomplishments. Albert was a trusted mentor across the field.

¶6 For me, there are a few particular things that I remember about Albert, and they all came through in the annual report that he submitted to Dean Scott Bice in 1985. (As an aside to my colleagues, the reports in those days ran a full two or three paragraphs.) The first is Albert's wit. He had a very dry sense of humor. As some of you may know, in 1984, Albert agreed to serve for a year as the interim deputy director of the USC University Library. In typical USC fashion, he was expected to discharge his normal tasks as the leader of the law school's library, and he was expected to spend eighty percent of his time as the interim deputy director. In Albert's report, the first sentence reads, "I suppose most of my activity this year most nearly falls under the category of institutional service—Doheny [the university library] has many similarities to an 'institution.'"

¶7 Also in that report there is the sentence, "I stumbled into a little fund-raising this year: a gift from George Dunning." This one sentence illustrates the two other traits that I want to mention. The first is Albert's passion for the library. His relationship with George Dunning inspired George to become a major benefactor of the library that Albert so loved. Over the course of the years since the "little fund-raising," the George Dunning Foundation has contributed more than \$1.6 million to the law school.

¶8 The final attribute that you can see in that sentence is Albert's deep humility. Indeed, when I first met Albert, I think this is what struck me the most. You see, I had known about Albert for years. At Vanderbilt, where I began my academic career, I participated on two occasions in looking for a person to lead the law library. As we searched for the best person to move our library forward, it became clear that, across the library community, Albert was the gold standard. So, when I walked into his office that first time, I knew I was meeting a person at the top of the profession. We have all met similarly accomplished people at times; too often, they are their own biggest fan. Not so with Albert. As we chatted, every time I tried to express my admiration for him, Albert deflected the praise to others—"It was the great deans with whom I worked—Dorothy Nelson, Scott Bice, and Matt Spitzer"; "It was the wonderful staff that I had." We, however, know the truth. Albert was the prime mover in developing what is one of the best law libraries in the country.—Robert K. Rasmussen<sup>1</sup>

¶9 In 1973, when I was dean of the law school, I was a little surprised when Francis Gates brought Albert in to me. Albert was twenty-six at the time, but looked barely sixteen. However, when Albert, in his lovely southern accent, said, "I'm so pleased to meet you ma'am; I hear you are a great lover of libraries," I knew we had the right man to become our assistant librarian. When Francis Gates left to

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1. Dean and Carl Mason Franklin Chair in Law, and Professor of Law and Political Science, USC Gould School of Law, Los Angeles, California.

become librarian at Columbia University Law School, he said that Albert should become head librarian, and I couldn't have agreed more. In the two short years he had been there, Albert had let it be known that he was there to serve the faculty. He had prepared several bibliographies for me when I was a delegate to the U.N. Conference on Women in Mexico City, where I was scheduled to give a talk for the women of the West. Mrs. Sadat, who was to give a talk for the women of the East, invited me to her palace in Cairo to discuss our talks. Albert traveled several times to the county law library to obtain materials on Egypt's justice system, and on the role of women in Egypt. He did the same for me when I was invited to visit Queen Farah of Iran, who later accepted an honorary degree from USC in part because I demonstrated such knowledge about the women of Iran. When I complimented Albert on the extraordinary work he had done for me in addition to serving everyone else, he said something to me I have never forgotten. He said an ancient philosopher once said, "The secret of work is service, that golden talisman that changes drudgery into pleasure, fatigue into contentment, and boredom into interest."

¶10 I remember the faculty meeting at which we voted to make him an assistant professor. One faculty member asked whether I thought he would ever publish. It gives me great pleasure now to look at his long list of publications. He was a pioneer in the use of information technology and specialized in computerized legal research and the expanding role of law librarians in the scholarly pursuits of the faculty. Among his many publications are *The Impact of Automation on Academic Libraries*<sup>2</sup> and *Changes in Legal Scholarship and Their Impact on Law School Library Reference Services*.<sup>3</sup> Little wonder then that Albert was one of the most influential leaders in law librarianship and that he was elected president of the American Association of Law Libraries and the Southern California Association of Law Libraries. In 2002, the latter association bestowed upon Albert its highest honor, the Rohan Chapter Service Award.

¶11 Albert was loved by everyone. Faculty are not always easy to please. Therefore, I was very happy when Professor Carl Franklin, who taught international law and then became a vice president of the university, came to me and said: "You take good care of Albert Brecht. He is a treasure." It was no surprise that Dr. Franklin later raised \$500,000 from the John Stauffer Foundation, for which he was one of three trustees, to endow the John Stauffer professorship for Albert.

¶12 Albert was especially loved by his staff. He had a gift for hiring the best talented young professionals, giving them guidance, allowing them to be creative, and helping them to grow and develop as leaders of law librarianship. Some are now head law librarians at major law schools.

¶13 Albert was a joy to have as a colleague and will be missed very much. He left a great legacy that shall endure for the benefit not only of USC, but also of librarians across the United States.—Dorothy W. Nelson<sup>4</sup>

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2. Albert Brecht, *The Impact of Automation on Academic Libraries*, in *LEGAL INFORMATION FOR THE 1980'S: MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION* 159 (Betty W. Taylor ed., 1982).

3. Albert Brecht, *Changes in Legal Scholarship and Their Impact on Law School Library Reference Services*, 77 *LAW LIBR. J.* 157 (1984–85).

4. Senior Judge, United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, Pasadena, California.

¶14 Albert's heart was as big as his home state of Texas and as warm as Texan hospitality. Albert was always the first to ask how you were doing if you were having a tough time, or to give you an extra hug just when you needed it. He cared so very deeply for his family, and his friends who became family. And when Albert cared about a cause, he put his whole heart into it.

¶15 I can personally attest to this. I came to know Albert through our mutual involvement with the USC Lambda LGBT Alumni Association nearly twenty years ago. Even though Albert was not a USC alumnus, he could not have been a more loyal Trojan. He worked tirelessly to build our alumni base and secure our place as alumni leaders on campus.

¶16 In his capacity as one of Lambda's early co-presidents, Albert initiated our first capital fund-raising campaign. His successful efforts resulted in our first \$20,000. His leadership and guidance over the years have resulted in Lambda granting more than \$300,000 in scholarship funds to outstanding USC LGBT and ally students. I am pleased to say that as we embark upon our Twentieth Anniversary Capital Campaign, our goal is to fund an endowed scholarship in Albert's name, "The Albert Brecht Leadership Award." True to Albert's spirit, we will support our accomplished and talented USC LGBT and ally students who continue Albert's academic excellence, leadership, and yes, his heart. Albert was awarded the highest USC Alumni Association award, the President's Award, in 2009 for his leadership and contributions to Lambda Alumni. So it is especially fitting that we continue to honor his legacy through service to our students.

¶17 Perhaps one of the best examples of Albert's heart and determination later in his life was his love of running with the Los Angeles Frontrunners. I kept bugging Albert (an avid yoga practitioner) to "butch up" and come run with us. I think he finally did just to shut me up, and then he fell in love with it. I will never forget the look of absolute joy on his face when he completed his first 5K Pride Run. He kept saying, "I didn't think I could do it," to which I smirked, "Fine. Now that you know you can do it, don't ever think of beating me!" So that became his goal, and that is how Albert got his nickname, "Speed." When his motor and coordination difficulties became more pronounced, Albert became more determined than ever to leave me in the dust. And in fact, he did. His running with Frontrunners on Saturday mornings became a sanctuary for him. It was there, on the dirt trails of Griffith Park, that his grit and determination showed through. He never complained when his gait became shaky, he just smiled and said, "I'm still going."

¶18 And that is how I will always remember Albert. I think about him every day, and especially on the trails on Saturday mornings. I told him once near the end of his running days that he had the body of a sprinter and the heart of an ultramarathoner, a heart so strong and proud, a heart whose spirit will be carried by me, and so many others, forever.

¶19 When Albert's sister, Julianne; his brother-in-law, Larry; and I said our final good-byes at the end of his earthbound journey, we put a Frontrunners Pride Run T-shirt on him and a bouquet of Cardinal and Gold flowers in his hands. Speed, you have touched my heart, and the hearts of countless Trojans and Frontrunners. You will be running next to us forever.—Amy A. Ross<sup>5</sup>

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5. Associate Biologist, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, California.

¶20 I met Albert Brecht in the fall of 1969 at the University of Houston College of Law. I was one year out of my M.L.S. program, an assistant cataloging librarian, and going to law school part-time. Albert came to work in the Law Library as a student assistant when he enrolled at the University of Houston. We bonded at once! Interestingly, we had spent four years in Denton, Texas, at the same time—Albert at what was then North Texas State University (now the University of North Texas) and I across town at Texas Woman's University—but we never met there. Not only did we work together at the University of Houston, but we even had several law classes together. Al Coco, the law library director, was our wonderful boss and mentor, and he soon recognized Albert's excellence and began to talk to him about a career in law librarianship.

¶21 During the Houston years, I met Albert's parents several times and got to know Julianne and Larry before they even married. Oddly, Albert and I even went out on a few dates before we discovered one another's preferences! After that time we went to all law school functions together.

¶22 In 1972, Albert received his J.D. and went off to the University of Washington in Seattle to get his master's degree in law librarianship. Al Coco, Pat Kehoe (who was the assistant director of the law library), and I were all so proud of him! Not surprisingly, he was a star from the very beginning. Marian Gallagher, who directed the law librarianship program at the University of Washington, thought he was spectacular.

¶23 Albert and I remained friends for more than forty years. We visited back and forth; Seattle, Houston, Los Angeles, Oklahoma, and North Carolina. We comforted each other through breakups, new partners, and job changes (mostly mine, since Albert stayed put). We buried mutual friends, all the time having each other despite the geographic separation. We saw each other at least twice a year at annual meetings of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) and the Association of American Law Schools. A highlight of each meeting was dinner together with a few old friends and some years with new ones.

¶24 We served on the AALL Executive Board together. I was president in 1986–87 and Albert was president the following year. Albert always indulged my craziness, which involved the final banquet. Believe it or not, in 1986, the Association still rented tuxedos for the men on the Board, with nothing similar for the women. So, I insisted that AALL rent a tux for me that year, and I wore it to the banquet. Needless to say, that was the last year that the Association paid to rent tuxedos. The following year, 1987, marked the two hundredth anniversary of the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. I am not sure why, but I decided that it would be a great idea for the Executive Board to appear in Colonial drag. I was a lot heavier than I am now; my dress was bright red and I had a huge white wig with ringlets and looked like either Mrs. Santa Claus or a Colonial madam. Everyone looked so silly except Albert. He looked great in tight silk knee pants and a fancy brocade coat; he insisted that his mother had a sofa covered in the same brocade fabric! Best of all was his wig—white with a huge pompadour that jiggled whenever he moved his head. Albert said that he thought he looked like Little Richard. I wonder what future law librarians will think when they see the photographs of that banquet.

¶25 In 1999, the University of North Carolina dedicated a new law school wing, a large part of which was library space. When it was time to invite a speaker for the library dedication, I never considered anyone other than Albert Brecht. Not surprisingly, he was brilliant and charming. Our faculty and the North Carolina legal community were wowed by the depth of his knowledge, his insights, and the quality of the delivery of his talk.

¶26 Albert was warm, loving, very funny, unfailingly kind, and one of the best friends I have ever had. At the time of Albert's diagnosis in 2009, I had just had surgery for breast cancer. So, despite the long distance, we went through this together. He was always more concerned about how I was doing than about himself. Albert and Julianne's parents lived well into their nineties. My mother will be ninety this summer. He and I used to joke that we'd still be going to AALL in 2037 when we were in our nineties. We'd bedazzle our walkers, still have fun and be fabulous! How unfair that he is now gone.

¶27 I have never seen such love and devotion for a sibling as I saw in Julianne's care for Albert. I admire her so much. I know the fact that Julianne and Larry were with him at the end meant so much to Albert.

¶28 A very good man is no longer with us. His absence leaves a huge void in our hearts. I will miss him forever, but I am a better person for having had Albert in my life.—Laura N. Gasaway<sup>6</sup>

¶29 Albert was someone who created a memorable first impression. You immediately noticed that he was impeccably dressed—with tailored shirts and suits and designer ties. Then you were dazzled by his Texas charm and dry and engaging wit. For those who had the privilege to know him, Albert left an indelible impression.

¶30 I knew Albert as my teacher, my boss, my mentor, and my friend. Albert was my first law professor. At that time, legal research was a separate course not integrated with legal writing. Albert and the law librarian instructors offered two one-week summer sessions for incoming first-year students. Typical of any first-year student, I thought I had it made because I had worked in a library and already knew something about libraries: card catalogs, OCLC, LC subject headings. As a true teacher, Albert taught me that I really didn't know anything, and I had to learn about jurisdiction, primary sources, digests, Shepard's, etc. In the classroom, Albert showed his students that he cared deeply about his subject matter and, more important, he cared deeply that his students learned it well.

¶31 I next encountered Albert as my prospective employer. I decided to pursue a career in law librarianship and was interviewing for a reference librarian position at USC. I was excited about the opportunity to return "home," so to speak. During the interview process, I was very impressed with everyone I met. What I found most striking was that all the librarians had a strong commitment and enthusiasm for their profession. Almost everyone had been in the profession for a significant number of years, and everyone was very engaged and interested in their work. At the center was Albert—it was obvious that he set the tone and the expectations.

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6. Paul B. Eaton Distinguished Professor of Law, UNC School of Law, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.



Clearly, this was a very dynamic place to work, and I had no hesitation in accepting Albert's offer.

¶32 All of us who worked for him can attest that underneath that Texas charm was steel. Of course, he wouldn't have achieved his success without it. He knew what he wanted, and he expected us to make it happen. He set very high performance standards for the librarians and the staff—standards he held himself to as well. Our mission: deliver exceptional, outstanding service to our faculty and our students. He entrusted the day-to-day management of the library to the team of law librarians. All of us who worked for him accepted the service challenge and delivered to the best of our ability. We all were very anxious to please him. It was devastating if we disappointed him and did not meet his expectations. How did he do this? How did he manage to instill this service philosophy in so many people?

¶33 I recently read an article on leadership, and the author defined leaders as "individuals who significantly influence the thoughts, behaviors, and/or feelings of others."<sup>7</sup> Albert personified this definition. He taught us by his example, his passion for his work, and his refusal to be complacent. He challenged us to problem-solve, to think through policy or service issues, and he freely shared his knowledge and insights. He encouraged us to perform at our best. He praised and celebrated our success because our individual achievements made the entire library enterprise successful; he was never one to grab credit for someone else's work. He didn't micro-manage—he just expected us to make it happen.

¶34 Albert also strongly believed in supporting professional development opportunities for his team of librarians. He financially supported our attendance at national and regional conferences and meetings. He permitted us to spend work time on professional association committee activities or governing boards. Albert believed that professional development participation enriched a librarian's working knowledge and experience, which in turn greatly benefited the institution.

¶35 As much as Albert focused on maintaining high service standards, he poured equal effort into creating a supportive and collegial work environment. We celebrated birthdays every month; we had holiday parties, summer picnics, pizza parties for our student workers. During these times, Albert's wicked sense of humor shone. Who could forget the holiday party where he put on a garbage bag and sunglasses and be-bopped to the tune of *I Heard It Through the Grapevine* as a California raisin? Legend has it that at another holiday party, Albert, to the shock of many, played his accordion. Yes, in his youth, he did take accordion lessons. This is just another example of Albert's astute leadership: he recognized that these types of social events fostered teamwork and collegiality—key elements to maintaining a good and productive work environment.

¶36 As I mentioned, Albert was not only my boss, but also my mentor. But not exclusively mine; a number of my colleagues who worked at USC also proudly called him mentor. Albert had a gift for hiring the best talented young professionals and giving them the guidance and creativity to grow and develop into directors of

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7. Barbara L. Mackoff, *Define Leader: The Definition and Development of Law Librarians as Leaders*, 101 LAW LIBR. J. 471, 481, 2009 LAW LIBR. J. 26, ¶ 38 (quoting HOWARD GARDNER, *LEADING MINDS* 6 (1995)).

academic law libraries and leaders in law librarianship. The list includes Steve Barkan (Marquette and Wisconsin), Darin Fox (Oklahoma), Paul George (Penn), John Hasko (Idaho), the late Alan Holoch (Ohio State and Villanova), Frank Houdek (Southern Illinois), Tory Trotta (Arizona State), and myself (Vanderbilt). Albert generously shared his insights with his management team regarding day-to-day administration, budget planning, policy issues, and professional challenges. He always looked for opportunities to help junior law librarians develop administrative skills, whether it was assigning a project to manage or restructuring the library's organizational chart to give someone a managerial opportunity. And if an opportunity for a librarian beckoned at a different academic institution, Albert never hesitated to support and guide that librarian, although he also fought hard to persuade the person to stay. When those of us who moved on to other institutions would get together at various national meetings, we would share experiences and challenges and always found ourselves asking: "What would Albert do?"

¶37 In recognition of his mentoring efforts, the Southern California Association of Law Libraries (SCALL), in 2002, awarded Albert its highest honor: the Rohan Chapter Service Award for his outstanding service and contributions to SCALL as an active member and a mentor to many newer law librarians who went on to oversee law libraries across the country.

¶38 In celebrating Albert's achievements, I need also to underscore his work to build core technology services for the law school. Eons ago, when the law school started to expand the range of technology services for the school, the faculty quickly recognized that Albert was the pivotal administrator who should lead this endeavor. Why? Because the faculty knew Albert would place service at the top of the skill set for computing staff. Albert knew he could recruit individuals who possessed excellent technical skills, but successful candidates also needed to have excellent interpersonal and communication skills. Albert hired key IT administrators who embraced the service philosophy. As Albert would have been the first to acknowledge, he wasn't a technologist and he was certainly not a geek. But he shrewdly understood and kept up with technological developments in legal education and ensured the technology infrastructure could meet the research, teaching, and operational needs of the law school.

¶39 I knew Albert not only on a professional basis, but also as a friend. I will treasure our restaurant explorations and our shared interests in film and the arts, and I will miss his sage advice. Above all, I'm forever grateful that he gave me the opportunity to work at USC, where I met a remarkable group of people who became not only colleagues but lifelong friends.

¶40 I've had the pleasure and privilege to get to know Albert's sister, Julianne, and her husband, Larry, especially during these last couple of years. It's now easy for me to see that Albert's genuine interest in people and his courtesy and consideration of others are core family values. Julianne is amazing and Albert was so blessed to have Julianne at his side to laugh with him, to love him, and to be with him night and day to comfort him.

¶41 Albert's legacy won't be a building, won't be a collection, won't be his publications. It will be the people he influenced, guided, and taught. One of our alums



from the class of 1986, Rich Mandelbaum, contacted me after receiving the news of Albert's passing, and said:

I still remember Albert as such an extraordinary human being. Albert was one of the most approachable, and kindest, professors/administrators I knew during my three years at the Law School. And his door was always open to me—for reasons that I didn't completely understand at the time, except perhaps in the sense that we had a mutually respectful relationship and that he knew that I was always trying to write term papers for my upper-level classes on unconventional legal subjects (for which the advice of the chief USC Law School librarian was often very helpful).

That's an indelible impression.

¶42 Albert will be so dearly missed. But he will forever be remembered as a leader in the field of law librarianship, a valued colleague, a respected mentor and boss, a memorable teacher, a treasured friend, and a beloved brother and uncle.

¶43 Dear Albert: we raise a glass of Texas punch and salute you.—Pauline M. Aranas<sup>8</sup>

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8. Associate Dean, Acting Dean of Library and Information Technology, and Adjunct Professor of Law, USC Gould School of Law, Los Angeles, California.